

CLAIMS

We claim:

1. A method for selective telephone call screening, comprising the steps of:
 - a) providing a user defined list of calling number identification values (CNIDs) and a list of user screening rules;
 - b) storing said CNIDs and said screening rules onto a database;
 - c) receiving a CNID from an incoming telephone call;
 - d) determining if said CNID of said incoming telephone call is valid or erroneous;
 - e) selecting a certain set of said screening rules so as to apply to said incoming telephone call, hereafter referred to as the classification of said incoming telephone call;
 - f) verifying said selected screening rules which have been enabled by a user; and
 - g) establishing whether said incoming telephone call will be allowed to continue to ring or be terminated pursuant to said selected screening rules.
2. The method of claim 1, wherein said step (e) comprises:
 - a) retrieving from said database said screening rules for a specific CNID error when a CNID is erroneous;
 - b) searching said database for a match to a unique received CNID when said CNID is valid pursuant to said selected screening rules; and
 - c) retrieving from said database said selected screening rules for instances when the valid CNID is not present in said database.
3. The method of claim 2, wherein said selected screening rules may further include selecting a method to communicate to a calling party that a call has been screened and to prompt the calling party for a response, comprising the steps of:
 - a) seizing a telephone line and then playing a prerecorded message;

- b) prompting for a predefined key entry so as to eliminate incoming automated calling parties; and
 - c) prompting for a stored pass code entry for caller authentication.
4. The method of claim 1 wherein said database can store said CNIDs for entire area codes and exchanges.
5. The method of claim 1, further comprising providing an electronic device for carrying out said selective telephone screening.
6. The electronic device of claim 5, comprising:
- a) line interface means for connecting said electronic device to a telephone line;
 - b) ring detector means for detecting a ring signal of an incoming call from a telephone company central office (CO);
 - c) means to receive said CNID information;
 - d) means to store said CNID and said screening rules' database; and
 - e) controller means for implementing said method so as to determine whether or not an incoming call is allowed to continue to ring.
7. The electronic device of claim 5, further comprising:
- a) means for a user to enter and manage entries into said database;
 - b) means to display device information and database entries; and
 - c) means for said user to globally enable and disable said screening rules.
8. The electronic device of claim 5, wherein after said ring detector detects a first ring said CNID receiver decodes said incoming call CNID so that said controller can determine which of said screening rules contained in said database apply to said incoming call, and said controller compares said rules to said user enabled rules so as to determine the outcome of said incoming call.

9. The electronic device of claim 5 wherein
 - a) the call continues to ring if said controller determines that said incoming call is allowable; and
 - b) line interface means seizes said telephone line so as to terminate said incoming call if necessary.
10. The electronic device of claim 9 wherein step (b) further comprises:
 - a) means to play prerecorded messages after a line is seized;
 - b) controller means to prompt and authenticate an appropriate caller response;
 - c) ringing a telephone if an appropriate response is received; and
 - d) disconnecting a telephone line if an inappropriate response is received.
11. The electronic device of claim 5 wherein said database comprises a maskable memory array so as to create wildcard entries.
12. The electronic device of claim 5 wherein said display comprises a liquid crystal display.